

**METHOD FOR RESTORING ADMINISTRATIVE DATA RECORDS OF A MEMORY
THAT CAN BE ERASED IN UNITS OF BLOCKS**

FIELD

The invention describes a method for restoring the administrative data records of a nonvolatile memory that can be written to in units of sectors and erased in units of blocks, said records being stored in a volatile flag memory of an associated memory controller.

BACKGROUND

The widely used nonvolatile semiconductor memories (flash memories) are organized in blocks and in sectors, with a block consisting, e.g., of 32 sectors with 512 bytes each. The memories have the property that new information can be written in units of sectors and only previously erased sectors can be written to. The erasing takes place in each case for one block for all sectors together. Writing a sector to the memory takes longer than the reading and an erasure operation of a block requires a long time, e.g., several milliseconds.

According to a method for which patent protection is also being applied for at this time, tables in which administrative data records are recorded for the blocks and sectors in each case are maintained by a program in the associated memory controller in an immediate-access volatile flag memory. These tables essentially consist of assignments of logical block addresses to physical block addresses and the addresses of alternate blocks when sectors are written to the nonvolatile memory. If there now is a power failure, the data disappears from the volatile flag memory. They would thus have to be contained backed up in a portion of the nonvolatile memory at this time to be able to continue to operate with correct data after a restart. However, because of the duration of the write operations, there is no time left for this in case of a power failure. Constantly backing up all administrative data records with copies, however, would slow down all write operations and result in an increased wear on the nonvolatile memory.

Patent document US 5,598,370 describes a method for backup of administrative data records. The information is distributed here over all blocks of the memory and considerable effort is required to reconstruct the administrative data.

Patent document US 5,930,193 A also describes a method for saving the administrative tables in a separate memory area of the nonvolatile memory when the system is turned off. However, this is possible only with a proper shutdown; if there is an unexpected power failure, the administrative data records are lost.

European patent application EP 1 031 929 A2 also describes a method for backing up data records of a volatile memory with data records in a nonvolatile memory and, after a power failure, reading the data records in chronological sequence and thus reconstruct the data in the volatile memory. This method is intended for the parameters of an electro-mechanical peripheral device and does not take into consideration the particularities of a nonvolatile memory that requires an administration of alternate memory blocks and their reorganization.

PCT application WO00/49488 also describes a method for backing up the translation table of logical sector addresses to physical sector addresses by means of an additional address table. However, this does not record all administrative data records that must be kept current in a memory controller. Additional complex methods are provided for that.

SUMMARY

It is the object of the invention to reveal a method that permits the administrative data records for a memory that can be written in units of sectors and erased in units of blocks to be maintained in a high-speed volatile flag memory of the associated memory controller and to completely restore these administrative data records during a restart after a power failure.

This object is met in such a way that in the nonvolatile memory a reconstruction table is continually updated, in which the write and erase operations are recorded as an entry to such an

1 extent that the administrative data records of the internal flag memory can be completely
2 reconstructed in each case during a restart after a power failure.

3 Advantageous embodiments are specified in the subclaims.
4

5 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

6 The embodiment of the invention is described by way of example in the figures.

7 Fig. 1 shows the setup of a reconstruction table.

8 Fig. 2 shows the correlation between the intermediate pointer table and the block pointer
9 table.
10

11 DETAILED DESCRIPTION

12 In the nonvolatile memory one or more data blocks are reserved, into which a reconstruction
13 table is written. This reconstruction table has a defined length of e.g., 128 sectors. In the volatile
14 memory, administrative data records are created for the memory blocks that are being written to,
15 said administrative data records containing among other things the logical and physical block
16 addresses, as well as the addresses of the alternate blocks that are actively being written to. If new
17 memory blocks are now written to, or new alternate blocks are made available, and obsolete
18 assignments of logical to physical block addresses are dissolved, one entry is continually written
19 into the reconstruction table in each case. The respective entry in the reconstruction table contains at
20 least the logical block address, the physical block address of the original memory block, as well as
21 the address of the possibly used alternate block.
22

23 If, after a power failure, a restart of the memory system now takes place, the administrative
24 data records in the volatile flag memory are initialized empty by the program of the memory
25 controller and the reconstruction table is then processed from the beginning and the assignments are
26 entered into the administrative data records based on each entry in the reconstruction table. This is
27 repeated for each entry in the reconstruction table until the end of this table has been reached. In the
28 process it is quite possible that some assignments are overwritten multiple times since they were
29 also updated in the course of the original processes of saving. At the end of the restart, however, the

1 current status of the address assignments in the administrative data records is restored to the form in
2 which it existed prior to the power failure.

3
4 In an advantageous embodiment of the reconstruction table, the same is set up in such a way
5 that every entry in the table is exactly one sector long, even if not all bytes of the sector are filled.
6 Since the memory is always written to in units of sectors, no additional effort is required for data
7 preparation. Even though this leaves some memory space unused, this is of no consequence given
8 the size of the total memory. Since all sectors, starting from the current entry in the table onward,
9 are also erased, the next entry is written directly into the table without any additional effort.

10
11 With some types of nonvolatile memory it is also possible to write only a segment of a
12 sector, of e.g., 128 bytes, independently from the other segments of the sector. In these types, only
13 such a segment of a sector is written to, and accordingly for example only one memory block is
14 needed for the reconstruction table.

15
16 Due to the special design of the reconstruction table and storing of this table in the
17 nonvolatile memory, the effect is that even during a reconstruction of the administrative data
18 records, no errors will be caused if the power is lost again. This is due to the fact that during the
19 renewed restart of the system, the reconstruction table is analyzed again in its entirety and the
20 current state of the administrative data records is then arrived at in this manner.

21
22 Since the reconstruction table has a defined length, e.g., 128 entries, it is filled almost to the
23 end during normal memory operation. A reorganization is started preferably after the next to last
24 entry has been written. For this purpose, a record regarding the reorganization is written into the
25 reconstruction table as the last entry. All address assignments as they are currently listed in the
26 administrative data records are then erased and a defined initial state is thus created in the
27 administrative data records, like it would also first be initialized during a system restart.

1 The method is improved further if a completion entry is written into the reconstruction table
2 after a successful reorganization. This completion entry is advantageously provided with a count
3 value, which is incremented during every reorganization.
4

5 Additionally, it is advantageous during every reorganization to create a new reconstruction
6 table in other memory blocks. These are taken from the supply of erased memory blocks that are
7 either still originally erased or that were erased by a background program. The completion entry is
8 written into the new reconstruction table as the first entry. The blocks that have existed for the
9 reconstruction table so far are then released and in this manner marked in such a way that they are
10 prepared for erasing by the background program. If there is a power failure during the process of the
11 reorganization and a new completion entry was not yet written, the reorganization is started anew
12 during the system restart. The reorganization is repeatable any number of times.
13 If the completion entry was already written but the existing reconstruction table was not yet
14 released, it is possible that two reorganization tables, the previous one and the new one, are found
15 during a restart of the system. In that case, a determination regarding which is the newer table is
16 made based on the count value in the completion entry of the reconstruction table and the
17 reorganization process is continued accordingly. The correct continued operation of the memory
18 system is thus ensured in those cases as well.
19

20 During each new address assignment of physical block addresses to logical block addresses,
21 the block pointers in the block pointer table must be changed accordingly. This block pointer table is
22 located in the nonvolatile memory and writing of the changes would have to take place every time
23 via the alternate block mechanism. To optimize the write operations, an intermediate pointer table is
24 maintained in the volatile flag memory in which intermediate pointer table the changed address
25 assignments with the logical block address and changed physical block address are recorded. This
26 table is organized according to logical block addresses. If an address assignment is now performed,
27 a check is first performed in this intermediate pointer table, whether the logical block address is
28 recorded there. If this is the case the physical memory address listed there is used, otherwise the
29 physical memory block address from the block pointer table is used. The intermediate pointer table

1 thus indicates which entries in the block pointer table are no longer valid. With the above-described
2 reorganization, the block pointer tables in the nonvolatile memory are also written anew and updated
3 with the values from the intermediate pointer table. The changes of the block pointers are thus
4 written anew into the nonvolatile memory only during the reorganization, and a great number of
5 write operations has thus been eliminated.

6
7 If there is a power failure, the intermediate pointer table is lost. However, since every new
8 address assignment with its logical and physical block addresses since the last reorganization has
9 been saved as an entry in the reconstruction table, the intermediate pointer table is also reconstructed
10 during a restart of the system.

11
12
13 Fig. 1 shows the setup of the reconstruction table RKT. It consists of 128 entries in this case,
14 each of which is one sector long. The first entry is marked as the completion entry FE and
15 additionally contains the completion counter FZ. There is room for additional administrative data
16 VD. Starting with the second entry, reconstruction entries RE are recorded that contain, from the
17 memorized write operations, the entries for the logical block addresses LBA, the physical memory
18 block addresses SBA, the utilized alternate block addresses ABA, as well as additional
19 administrative data VD. The last entry in the reconstruction table RKT is marked as reorganization
20 entry OE. It, too, has room for additional administrative data VD.

21
22 In Fig. 2 the block pointer table BZT is shown, which is indexed with the logical block
23 address LBA and contains in each case the associated physical memory block address SBA. This
24 table BZT is located in the nonvolatile memory. In the volatile flag memory, the intermediate
25 pointer table ZZT is established, which contains in each table line an assignment of logical block
26 addresses LBA to physical memory block addresses SBA. These are the logical block addresses
27 LBA, the assignment of which to physical memory block addresses SBA has changed since the last
28 reorganization. The table lines are sorted according to ascending logical block addresses LBA and

- 1 indicate the entries in the block pointer table BZT that are no longer valid and will be updated
- 2 during the next reorganization.

1	Reference ¹ Numerals
2	
3	ABA Alternate block address
4	BZT Block pointer table
5	FE Completion entry
6	FZ Completion counter
7	LBA Logical block address
8	LBAn Logical block address n in the ZZT
9	OE Reorganization entry
10	RE Reconstruction entry
11	RKT Reconstruction table
12	SBA Memory block address
13	VD Administrative record data
14	ZZT Intermediate Pointer Table

¹ Translator's Note: Approximately half of this word is missing in the German-language document on which this translation is based. It appears however, that the German word is "Bezugszeichen", which was translated as "Reference Numerals".